

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Philip T. Reeker

Media Availability after Meeting with Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski

June 17, 2013 – Skopje, Macedonia

Thank you for coming out this morning. It is a pleasure for me to be back in Macedonia. I think this is my first visit since almost a year ago. First and foremost, congratulations to the Macedonian National Handball team for their victory last night over Portugal. It was a great match. Ambassador Wohlers and I were there to watch it, and I always enjoy the opportunity to follow the Macedonian Rakomet (handball) team.

I've had the opportunity already this morning to meet with President Ivanov and now with Prime Minister Gruevski. We had a nice chance to discuss various activities, events, and developments in the region. As you know I travel frequently throughout this region, covering all the countries of the Western Balkans. Obviously, there will be some major developments in the next two weeks. In less than two weeks Croatia will join the European Union. Already a member of NATO, I think that this is a big step for them, and reminds us of the European perspective as a positive way forward; something that the United States very much supports.

And obviously, there was also the agreement of April 19th between Serbia and Kosovo. We are just coming up on one year since the new government in Serbia was formed. And a tremendous amount of development has taken place through that EU-led dialogue, which the United States has also supported greatly. You will recall that Secretary Clinton traveled with High Representative Ashton last fall in the region before Secretary Clinton finished her mandate as Secretary of State, and we have lent our full support to those efforts as well. I have been these two weeks in Montenegro, where I had the opportunity to participate in a regional forum there, and from Skopje I will go on Wednesday to Zagreb for some meetings there, so thank you all very much.

Question - Ambassador Reeker, in Sarajevo you said that many politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina should do some things on many issues. Here in Skopje, is the conversation with the President and the Prime Minister on similar issues?

Ambassador Reeker - Well I believe the speech I gave in Sarajevo was an important speech. It reflected the views from Secretary Kerry, and the Obama administration, shared with our European colleagues, that the stagnation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the fact that the country has not moved forwards on its proscribed Euro-Atlantic path, is frustrating, first and foremost for the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina. We can see, having worked very hard with our extended hands to provide opportunities for them, that it is the leadership there that prefers the status quo, that their personal and party agendas are far more important to them than the agendas of the state. And I laid that out just as a matter of fact and opinion and I hope that within Bosnia there will be a discussion about that.

So I think it is worth reading. It was an important opportunity for us to express our views and the fact that we still want to be very engaged. We do a tremendous amount in this region. And of course I bring that same message here. We have an ambassador and an embassy team who are very engaged. We have a strong friendship with Macedonia and the people of Macedonia, and we look to the same kind of Euro-Atlantic future for the whole region, as really the best way forward, and we're seeing that of course with Serbia and Kosovo, and Croatia as I mentioned.

Question – Did you talk just now that the opposition has no leader, and then about the name issue of course.

Ambassador Reeker - The Prime Minister mentioned to me that he had met with the new leader of the opposition. I will have a chance to meet with him, Mr. Zaev, later this afternoon I think. I know him of course from my time here and he was still Mayor of Strumica. Dialogue is obviously good, it's very important. Constructive opposition has an important role to play in any democracy. I think you had some challenges with that here in Macedonia last December, where it was very evident, and we would certainly hope with this new start, there is an opportunity there to discuss how everybody can work on the same path. You will see, for instance in Serbia, that this has been important. Not only that their

coalition has come together to make some difficult decisions, but to take advantage of the international community's offer to lend a hand through the European Union, the High Representative Ashton, and the U.S. supports that very much there too. So dialogue should certainly be a word on everybody's tongue.

Question – What about the latest development regarding the name issue? It's said the situation is that Macedonia apparently accepted the latest proposal from Mr. Nimetz but that Greece refused to talk about it.

Ambassador Reeker - Well as you know, we very much support the UN process and Matthew Nimetz' efforts in that. Of course this is not a question of accepting or not accepting. It is a question of engaging based on what Matt Nimetz can put forward in a negotiation, which is required for anything. It's the same concept with Serbia and Kosovo for instance. They accepted a basic way forward, a direction, and then used that through a series of engagements, negotiations, that were facilitated by the European Union. They reached their agreement on April 19th, and are working on implementing that now.

We were pleased that Ambassador Nimetz had put forth a new proposal, and we had hoped that there would be momentum to work on that. Obviously, the process is still there and that is the process we support. Again, there needs to be a will and a desire to really move forward and to have a dialogue, not just with leaders but among the public as well. I think throughout the region that is an important theme; the people have an interest in what's going on, and they need to understand what the real issues are. Throughout the Western Balkans, there is so much mythology, often so much misunderstanding about issues, and really the Euro-Atlantic path is about putting aside those issues from the past, and moving forward for a better future. More stability, more security, and certainly more prosperity are at the basis of that.

Thank you all very much.